NEW BOOKS.

The Philosopher of the Superman.

Mr. Henry L. Mencken in "The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche" (Luce & Company, Boston) provides us with a very readable and clear account of the philosophy and the philosopher in question. He admires Nietzsche, we should say, but not always does he speak of him quite reverentially, and he appears to be amused by him now and then.

Nietzsche was born in 1844 at Röcken, a small town in the Prussian province of Saxony, and his father, a pastor of the Lutheran Church, named him after Friedrich Wilhelm IV., the one time demented Prussian King. There is a chapter telling of the boyhood and youth of the philosopher. His father died when he was 5 years old, and he was brought up in a household of pious women. As a child he was solitary, shrinking from the rude ways of the other boys. He liked flowers and books and music. "He could recite and sing, and he knew the Bible so well that he was able to dispute about its mysteries." Of course he played the piano. At 20 he entered Bonn. He was enrolled as a student of philology and theology, but he dropped theology at the end of his first semester. For a time he was "an everyday young man." He had a stick and a pipe and he drank beer. This period, however, was of the briefest. "Nietzsche resigned from his student corps, burned his walking sticks, forswore smoking and roistering and bade farewell to Johann Strauss and Offenbach forever. The days of his youth, of his carefree, merry gamboling, were over. Thereafter he was all solemnity and all seriousness." His sister in her memoirs adds to this: "From these early experiences there remained with him a lifelong aversion to smoking, beer drinking and the whole biergemüthlichkeit. He maintained that people who drank beer and smoked pipes were absolutely incapable of understanding him. Such people, he thought, lacked the delicacy and clearness of perception necessary to grasp profound and subtle problems." Still, we have known persons thus unfitted who were his ardent and vociferous disciples. Possibly they were pretenders.

When he was 26 Nietzsche began his term of compulsory military service. This was cut short, as had been his service to beer and tobacco. He was thrown from his horse and his pectoral muscles were so badly wrenched that he was condemned by a medical survey and discharged from the army. He had followed Prof. Ritschl, the philologist, from Bonn to Leipsic. It was while he was at Leipsic in the year 1865 that he made his discovery of Schopenhauer. He came upon a copy of "The World as Will and Idea" in a second hand book store. He was a little tardy, for this work had been abroad since 1819, but it was new and full of a new fire so far as he was concerned. He took it home and quivered with the joy of the pessimism that it poured out for him. In his own reminiscent words: "I took the book to my lodgings and flung myself on a sofa and read and read and read. It seemed as if Schopenhauer were addressing me personally. I felt his enthusiasm and seemed to see him before me." In the course of time Nietzsche disagreed with a good deal of Schopenhauer, as he did with a good deal of everything. He remained faithful, however, to the other's main idea, namely, that the dominant and only inherent impulse of man is the will to keep on living. This is the foundation principle of his own philosophy—a very grim and curious structure in its upper parts.

Nietzsche became a professor of classical philology at Basel in 1869. At that Swiss seat of learning he led, we read, a lonely and morose life. He had headaches and he made enemies. Some think that his insanity was already well under way at this period. Mr. Mencken says that though perhaps he seemed wild and impossible to those about him "it is not recorded that any one ever looked upon him as ridiculous." Let us trust, indeed, that matters did not come to so acute a point. It cannot, however, be doubted that he was noticeable. "His high brow," we read, "bared by the way in which he brushed his hair; his keen eyes, with their monstrous overhanging brows, and his immense, untrimmed mustache, gave him an air of alarming earnestness." A frontispiece portrait justifies this description and heightens its impression. Though German, he prided himself upon being of Polish descent. It delighted him to look wild and exotic, and, as he believed, like a Pole. He cultivated the look. "He regarded himself as a Polish grandee set down by an unkind fate among German shopkeepers, and it gave him vast pleasure when the hotel porters and street beggars, deceived by his disorderly façade, called him 'The Polack.'" Like a veritable Polish grandee avenging his wrongs he began by pitching into his German neighbors. He wrote his "Inopportune Speculations," the series of essays in which he attacked Richard Wagner, David Strauss and others. He began to evolve the superman. He let it be known how he despised such matters as "public opinion" and "majorities." They were unimportant compared with the doings and ideas of exceptional individuals. Hannibal, for instance, was vastly more important than all the other Carthaginians of his time put together. Of course Carlyle had had views concerning heroes. Carlyle, however, had no such powers of philosophical progress as were lodged in Nietzsche.

The wisdom of this philosopher does not seem to have been always serviceable in immediate ways. As an invalid he cannot be thought to have conducted himself philosophically. Being ill, he merged into the general unreasoning and unheroic habit. "He became, indeed, a hypochondriac of the first water. * * * He sought relief at all the baths and cures of Europe; he took hot baths, cold baths, salt water baths and mud baths. Every new form of pseudo-therapy found him in its fresh-man class. To owners of sanitaria and to inventors of novel styles of massage, irrigation, sweating and feeding he was a jo unlimited." He grew no better, but he persisted. He gave up his professorship in order to spend his winters in Italy. "He swallowed more and more pills; he imbibed mineral waters by the gallon." He was, to be sure, demonstrating the truth of his first philosophical proposition. He was evincing an inclination to survive. His idea of the means by which he would be likely to preserve himself is all that we may question.

Ill as he was, the evolution of his philosophy was continued. He worked as he could, turning out a number of books as he travelled about. The famous "Thus Spake Zarathustra" was conceived in the Engadine and written in Genoa, Sils Maria, Nice and Mentone. Its first part was published in 1883; the entire book, consisting of four parts, not until 1892. In describing this book Mr. Mencken says: "Toward the end Nietzsche throws all restraint to the winds and indulges to his heart's content in the rare and exhilarating sport of blasphemy. There is a sort of parody of the last supper, and Zoroaster's [Zarathustra's] backsliding disciples engage in the grotesque and indecent worship of a jackass. Wagner and other enemies of the author appear, thinly veiled, as ridiculous buffoons." Nietzsche's last book, "The Antichrist," which was to have been one of a series of four, was written with great speed between September 3 and September 30, 1888. In January of the following year its author became insane. He died at Weimar in 1900.

We may consider, though with diffidence, and of necessity briefly, the philosophy that Nietzsche built. Having read Schopenhauer, he asked himself why it was that the ancient Greeks should have so delighted in their gloomy tragedies. The answer was that these hopeless battles with fate represented to them exactly what was going on in life. He looked further and satisfied himself that the life of the Greeks was affected particularly by two conflicting ideas expressed in the nature of two gods, Apollo and Dionysus. Of these Apollo stood for the established order, for calm, for the maintenance of things as they were. When he reigned the Greeks dreamed and sang songs. But Dionysus was a strenuous and disturbing god. He upset everything. He smote with a hammer. Between the two the Greeks swung back and forth until finally Apollo prevailed, and that was the quiet and senile end of them. Having worked out this theory regarding the ancient Greeks, Nietzsche proceeded to apply it to modern civilization. He felt himself warranted in dividing mankind into two classes: one the apollonians, standing for permanence; the other the dionysians, standing for change. Of course the ordinary man says conservative and radical and feels no need of going so far as ancient Greece in order to gather the idea, but a philosopher is not ordinary. It would be curious if he should take short cuts, and it would not be imposing. Religion, law, morality, are apollonian conceptions. They need the attentions of an iconoclast, of a dionysian. Nietzsche's philosophy sets forth the idea and urgently, vociferously and at great length demands its application. He preaches the gospel of Dionysus. He calls for a ruthless, selfish, superior being, the superman, to advance the happiness of a mawkish and stagnant world.

Away with the Ten Commandments! Away with humility! Away with sympathy and mercy! The ancient Jews have foisted upon us their ideas of a slave morality. Ancient ideas are good only occasionally. The Greeks had some that were worth while, as we have seen. The ancients generally considered mercy a weakness. That was a good view; it was dionysian. The superman will be merciless. What is good and what is bad? Nietzsche defines good as "all that elevates the sense of power, the will to power and power itself." Bad he defines as "all that proceeds from weakness." Happiness he describes as "the feeling that power increases—that resistance is being overcome." He said: "I preach not contentedness, but more power; not peace, but war; not virtue, but efficiency. The weak and defective must go to the wall; that is the first principle of the dionysian charity. And we must help them go." This he said in "The Antichrist." He made his Zarathustra say: "One must learn how to love oneself with a whole and hearty love, that one may find life with oneself endurable, and not go gadding about. This gadding about is familiar; it is called 'loving one's neighbor.'" We recall that so eminent a Socialist as Mr. Upton Sinclair spoke favorably of Nietzsche in his cheerful socialistic novel "The Jungle." He appeared to think that the philosopher of the superman was a fellow Socialist. And yet this philosopher distinctly said: "A good and healthy aristocracy must acquiesce with a good conscience in the sacrifice of a legion of individuals, who for its benefit must be reduced to slaves and tools. The masses have no right to exist on their own account; their sole excuse for living lies in their usefulness as a sort of scaffolding upon which a more select race of beings may be elevated." That does not sound like socialism. It must be that the pleasant novelist had not read Nietzsche.

"I teach you," said Zarathustra, "the superman! Man is something that shall be surpassed. What, to man, is the ape? A joke or a shame. Man shall be the same to the superman—a joke or shame." Zarathustra also said: "This new table, O my brethren, I put over you: *Be hard!*" What Nietzsche thought of Christianity, truth, women and marriage, government, crime and punishment, education—it is all related here. His quarrel with Wagner is reviewed, and there is a chapter about his critics. Mr. Mencken contends that he was not too crazy to be a capable philosopher. It is possible.

Vulgar Latin.

It is now seventy years since Friedrich Diez by the publication of his "Grammar of the Romance Languages" put on a firm basis the study of the derivation of the Latin tongues. That French, Italian and Spanish, with the less distinguished sister languages, Provençal, Catalan, Portuguese, Rumanian, Rhaetian, and their dialects, were derived from the universal language of Rome was self-evident. Diez fixed the main rules for the development and showed that it was not so much the written as the spoken language of the Romans that provided the vocabulary for the daughter languages. He was a pioneer; he was handicapped by knowing some of his languages only from books, which led him into error; he knew nothing of modern phonetics, and he was obliged to guess at his "spoken" Latin. His followers have been able to throw light on many points that were dark to him, to correct his blunders and mistakes and to establish scientifically many matters that to him were merely conjectural.

Though he insisted, for instance, on a "spoken" Latin, he accepted for the derived languages their written form. The study of phonetics since his day has been applied to them and has shaken some of his conclusions. Research has been made, too, into the language the Romans spoke as distinguished from that they wrote, and in this not merely the test of vocabulary but that of pronunciation has been applied. From the English point of view it is regret-

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